

Message Text

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ACTION SCA-01

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R 010601Z FEB 77
FM AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2933
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 LENINGRAD 0127

SCA FOR ACTION; EUR FOR INFO

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CASC, UR, US
SUBJ: REPORTS ON LOCAL CONDITIONS AFFECTING OVERSEAS TRAVEL
OF AMCITS

REF: (A) MOSCOW 0478, (B) STATE 2840

1. SUMMARY: TRAVEL CONDITIONS IN LENINGRAD GENERALLY APPROXIMATE THOSE CONTAINED MOSCOW REPORT (REF A) WITH SOME VARIATIONS. AS SECOND "CAPITAL CITY" OF THE USSR, LENINGRAD HOSTS PERHAPS ABOUT THE SAME NUMBER OF TOURISTS AS VISIT MOSCOW EACH YEAR. SOVIET TOURIST OFFICIALS APPARENTLY EXPECT A GROWTH IN THE TOURIST TRADE IN LENINGRAD UP TO THE 1980 OLYMPIC GAMES AND BEYOND. A LARGE EXPANSION OF HOTEL FACILITIES IS PRESENTLY UNDERWAY. END SUMMARY.
2. POST CAN ADD LITTLE IN SUBSTANCE TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW'S EXCELLENT OVERALL REPORT ON TRAVEL CONDITIONS IN THE USSR AND CONFINES ITSELF TO SUPPLEMENTARY COMMENTS ON THAT REPORT.
3. VIOLENCE INVOLVING AMERICAN CITIZENS IS, AS REPORT NOTES, QUITE RARE, BUT AMERICAN AND OTHER FOREIGN TRAVELLERS CAN BECOME THE VICTIMS OF MINOR CRIME. ALTHOUGH ONE'S PROPERTY IS GENERALLY UNCLASSIFIED

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SAFE IN THE HOTEL OR WHILE THE TRAVELLER IS OTHERWISE IN IN-TOURIST'S CARE, LOSSES OF PURSES AND OTHER VALUABLES OCCUR. WHILE MANY SUCH LOSSES MAY BE ATTRIBUTED TO CARELESSNESS, THE LOST OBJECTS ARE RARELY, IF EVER, RECOVERED, AND SOME SUCH LOSSES ARE CERTAINLY DUE TO THE PICK-POCKETS AND PETTY THIEVES WHICH RUSSIAN ACQUAINTANCES ASSURE US ABOUND.

4. TOURISTS MUST ALSO BE ON GUARD AGAINST THOSE WHO OFFER TO BUY CLOTHING AND OTHER ARTICLES OR TO EXCHANGE MONEY AT RATES MUCH SUPERIOR TO OFFICIAL EXCHANGE QUOTATIONS, PRACTICES WHICH CAN LAND TOURISTS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE WITH AUTHORITIES. MONEY SHOULD BE EXCHANGED ONLY AT OFFICIAL EXCHANGE POINTS AT AIRPORTS AND AT HOTELS. INTERNATIONAL CURRENCY TRANSACTIONS ARE SUBJECT TO STRICT CONTROLS, AND THE CURRENCY DECLARATION DISCUSSED REFTEL IS THE MEANS BY WHICH AUTHORITIES CONTROL TOURISTS' MONETARY TRANSACTIONS. TO AVOID PROBLEMS, TOURISTS SHOULD DECLARE ALL RPT ALL CURRENCY THEY BRING WITH THEM TRUTHFULLY AND SHOULD RETAIN THE DECLARATION, ALL RECEIPTS SHOWING EXCHANGES, AND RECEIPTS FOR ALL LARGE PURCHASES AT HARD CURRENCY SHOPS. CUSTOMS AUTHORITIES AT THE DEPARTURE GATE WILL CERTAINLY REQUIRE RETURN OF THE CURRENCY DECLARATION. EACH YEAR SOVIET AUTHORITIES CONFISCATE HUNDREDS AND EVEN THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS FROM TOURISTS AND THREATEN THEM WITH PROSECUTION UNDER SOVIET LAW. EFFORTS TO OBTAIN THE RETURN OF SUCH FUNDS ARE UNAVAILING.

5. AS WITH FOREIGN CURRENCY, SO ALSO DO ARTICLES AND LITERATURE CONSIDERED "ANTI-SOVIET" PROVIDE AMPLE CASES OF RUINED VACATIONS. THE TERM "ANTI-SOVIET" HAS NEVER BEEN SATISFACTORILY DEFINED AS REFTEL AND PREVIOUS MOSCOW REPORTING MAKES CLEAR, BUT AREAS OF SENSITIVITY INCLUDE NATIONALITY PROBLEMS (SUBSUMING THE JEWISH EMIGRATION QUESTION), RELIGION, CONFLICTING IDEOLOGY, AVANTE-GARDE ART, PORNOGRAPHY, POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES, AND DISSENT. LIKEWISE, A TOURIST VISITING SOVIET CITIZENS INTERESTED IN THESE AREAS OF SENSITIVITY MAY BE SUBJECT TO HARRASSMENT BY AUTHORITIES. POST EMPHASIZES THAT AMERICAN CITIZENS HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO ENGAGE IN NORMAL TOURIST AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND INDEED THE DEMANDS UNCLASSIFIED

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AND EXPECTATIONS WITH WHICH AMERICAN TOURISTS CONFRONT SOVIET AUTHORITIES AND CITIZENS MAY WELL HAVE A BENEFICIAL, EDIFYING IMPACT IN THE LONG RUN. IN THE SHORT RUN, HOWEVER, AMERICANS ARE TO BE WARNED THAT WHILE THEY ARE IN THE SOVIET UNION THEY ARE SUBJECT TO RESTRICTIVE SOVIET LAWS WHICH ARE USUALLY STRICTLY ENFORCED.

6. OTHER MATTERS WHICH CAN LEAD THE TOURIST TO TROUBLE INCLUDE ANY EFFORT TO BRING IN ANY WEAPONS OR AMMUNITION; ANY EFFORT TO TAKE OUT ANY OBJECT OF ART OR ANTIQUITY OR "ANTIQUES" WITHOUT PERMISSION, AND ANY EFFORT TO TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS WHICH COULD IN ANY WAY BE CONSIDERED TO BREACH SECURITY WHICH SOVIET AUTHORITIES CONSTRUE BROADLY.

7. TRAVELLERS SOMETIMES ENCOUNTER HEALTH PROBLEMS IN THE SOVIET UNION WHICH REQUIRE THEM TO BE HOSPITALIZED, AND THEY FREQUENTLY FIND THIS AN UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE. WHILE SOVIET MEDICAL PERSONNEL USUALLY GO TO GREAT LENGTHS TO INSURE THE PROPER CARE AND COMFORT OF TOURISTS, THE TOURISTS SOMETIME CONSIDER THEIR EFFORTS INADEQUATE AND FIND THE HOSPITAL ACCOMMODATIONS AND FOOD GRIM.

8. TOURISTS COMING BY BUS OR PRIVATE AUTOMOBILE FIND THE ROADS POOR. ACCIDENTS ARE COMMON AND EVEN MOST ORDINARY FACILITIES FOR AUTOMOBILES FEW AND FAR BETWEEN.

9. WHATEVER PROBLEM THE TOURIST ENCOUNTERS, HE WILL OFTEN FIND IT AGGRAVATED BY THE RIGIDITY OF THE SYSTEM, WITH REGIONAL AUTHORITIES SEEMINGLY ALWAYS READY TO REFER DIFFICULT DECISIONS TO MOSCOW. CHANGING ITINERARIES, OBTAINING REFUND FOR UNUSED PORTIONS OF THE TRIP, MAKING UNSCHEDULED VISITS, AND OBTAINING PROMPT, EFFICIENT SERVICE IN GENERAL, REQUIRE GREAT TIME AND EFFORT, AND OFTEN DO NOT SUCCEED AT ALL. PERSONS TRAVELLING ON TOURIST VISAS FOR THE PURPOSE OF MARRYING A SOVIET CITIZEN ENCOUNTER YET ANOTHER SET OF DIFFICULTIES WHICH NORMALLY PRECLUDE THE ATTAINMENT OF THEIR OBJECT ON ONE TRIP. ALL SUCH PERSONS SHOULD DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS OF MARRIAGE IN THE SOVIET UNION WITH CONSULAR OR DEPARTMENT OFFICERS PRIOR TO UNDERTAKING SUCH TRIPS.
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FM AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2934
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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10. POST HAS BEEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN FIGURES ON TOURISM FROM INTOURIST BUT HAS THE DISTINCT IMPRESSION TOURISM CONTINUES TO GROW. THIS IS GIVEN CREDENCE BY THREE NEW HOTELS IN CITY IN VARIOUS STAGES OF PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION IN APPARENT EXPECTATION THAT THERE WILL BE CONSIDERABLE GROWTH OF FOREIGN TOURIST TRAVEL IN CONNECTION WITH THE 1980 MOSCOW OLYMPIC GAMES AND THAT THIS TRAVEL WILL ALSO AFFECT LENINGRAD.

11. EXPERIENCE AT CONGEN LENINGRAD HAS DIFFERED FROM THAT AT EMBASSY MOSCOW OVER THE PAST YEAR IN TWO MAIN RESPECTS: ILLNESS AND INJURY CASES HAVE BEEN MORE COMMON THAN DEATH CASES, OF WHICH THERE HAS BEEN ONLY ONE DURING PAST YEAR, AND THERE HAVE BEEN FEWER AIRPORT DETENTION CASES, PERHAPS BECAUSE MOST INTERNATIONAL TRAFFIC IS CENTERED IN MOSCOW.
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